DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 083 235 SP 007 434

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TITLE The Political Attitudes of Canadian Athletes.
PUB DATE Oct 72
NOTE 27p.; Paper presented at the Fourth Canadian Psycho-Motor Learning and Sport Psychology Symposium, Waterloo, Ontario (Canada), Oct. 23-25, 1972

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Athletes; *Athletics; *Group Membership; Opinions; *Political Affiliation; *Political Attitudes; Political Issues; Social Problems

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the general hypothesis that the greater the involvement in the athletic subculture as a member of a sport team, the greater the development of conservative political ideologies. The questionnaire, completed by 150 Canadian team and individual sport athletes, was an amalgam of the following units: a) the McClosky Political Conservatism Scale (MPCS); b) self-reported political ideology (SRPI); c) attitudinal statements evaluating issue-oriented conservatism or liberalism; d) Rehberg Political Action Scale (RPAS); and e) background questions. Analysis revealed a) no significant differences between team and individual athletes on the MPCS ans SRPI, with a leaning toward liberalism; b) no significant differences on attitudinal statements, with women in individual sports learning toward conservative responses; and c) agreement among athletes concerning involvement in political action. These results rejected the research hypothesis. (A discussion of the results is presented, with recommendations for future studies. Four tables of statistical data are included, along with a two-page bibliography.) (BRB)

ED 083235

THE POLITICAL ATTITUDES OF CANADIAN ATHLETES*

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SP 007 434

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INTRODUCTION

Apart from the long standing belief that athletics is essentially an apolitical institution within North American Society, little research attention has been directed to this question in order to determine its validity. Recently, however, there has been a developing interest in the political awareness of athletes and a concern has been expressed that athletes are "out of step" with the majority of their fellow students.

Various authors have presented conclusions, cnly some of which are based on empirical evidence, that athletes might be characterized as conservative on the continuum of political ideologies. Such conclusions appear to have considerable face validity, in view of the fact that the belief structures which are predominantly reinforced within the athletic subculture are those stressing the benefits of hard work, effort, diligence, delay of gratification and the association of prestige with success. All of these values fit neatly into the Horatio Alger stereotype that is the conservative model for adequate fulfillment of the American dream.

Basically, however, it might be noted that there is a strong association between the belief structures reinforced within the athletic institution, the predominant values of the economic institution which dominates society, and the major

beliefs behind the conservative political ideology.

Although the research concerned with this issue has been conducted almost exclusively within the United States, and the theoretical propositions guiding the present study are essentially linked to explaining behaviour in that society, it was believed that there was sufficient justification, especially in view of the close relationship between both economies, to expect that such an association would also be present within the Canadian setting.

THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT

The middle range theory which provided the basis for the study involved six basic points of reference:

1. The axiom that the predominant evaluative criteria employed within social institutions are those associated with the economy and the polity.

2. The axiom that predominant socialization experiences within the athletic institution reinforce the value structures which provide for effective participation in the economy.

3. The proposition that the greater the personal primacy of economic values the greater the adherence to conservative political ideologies.

4. The proposition that the greater the degree of involvement in the athletic subculture, the greater the personal primacy of economic values.

5. The proposition that the greater the degree of participation in the athletic subculture the greater the degree of adherence to conservative political ideologies.

6. Based upon the assumption that those members of the athletic subculture who participate as members of a team are provided with the more consistent and effective socialization experiences, the final proposition appears tenable; that the greater the involvement in the athletic subculture as a member of a sporting team, the greater the

development of conservative political ideologies.

It was this final proposition which formed the basic research hypotheses of this study.

The initial axiom that stressed the significance of economically based evaluative criteria within social institutions merely recognized the fact that we tend to evaluate people with whom we come in contact in terms of their economic power and occupational prestige. When one asks another, "What do you do?", the expected answer provides information of the other's occupation. From this information the questionner is able to place the respondent in a variety of categories related to his perceived importance and economic strength associated with that occupational title. The particular advantage of this rather simple procedure is the maximization of predictability with respect to the range of possible conversational openings that might be employed to lead to continuation of the interaction process. The response also makes it possible for the questionner to decide whether or not continuation of the process has personal value.

The second axiom recognized that the values regarded as central within the athletic institution mirror those regarded as significant within the economy and polity. Regardless of the ideals associated with sport, the convictions holding that the refinement of skill is a crucial end in itself, that the emphasis upon delayed gratification is necessary for the attainment of extrinsic rewards, and that

only through success or winning can one secure social recognition and prestige appear central. Such values have been stated so frequently in the mass media by esteemed members of the athletic community that we should now recognize them as major elements of the athletic value structure. Such value structures are clearly linked to those regarded as crucial for adequate functioning in the adult occupational role.

The first proposition recognized the fact that

> In the modern world, the political and economic domains have become so closely related that they are extremely difficult to separate in scale construction or in categorizing scales (Shaw and Wright 1967: 301-302).

In the context of the present study, the major economic values were regarded as those which are associated with hard work, persistence, diligence, recognition of the openness of the system for mobility, and the survival (or success) of the fittest. Such values may be seen as a combination of the central concepts of Social Darwinism and the American Dream.

The acceptance of Social Darwinism and the belief in the American Dream have diminished over time, as many have realized that particular social conditions exist which make it difficult or indeed impossible for substantial numbers of society to secure access to those crucial experiences which allow for equality of opportunity.

Nevertheless, many members of society continue to regard the American Dream as realizable for all who wish to partici-

pate in the process and regard failure as evidence of the power of Social Darwinism. These values, in association with a respect for the established order, for maintenance of the status quo, and resistence to social change, are component parts of the conservative political ideology.

The fact that such economic and political value structures are clearly linked may be seen by analysis of the voluminous body of research on the topic, and by analysis of the component questions used in a variety of political attitude scales (Shaw and Wright 1967: 301-327; Bonjean, Hill, and McLemore 1967: 300-307).

The second proposition summarized the research on the association between socialization through sport and the development of primacy of evaluative criteria more appropriate to the economic institution. Webb (1969), Petrie (1971a and 1971b), Mantel and VanderVelden (1971) and Maloney and Petrie (1972) have all provided empirical evidence indicating the presence of such an association in the United States and Canada. Such evidence indicated that there was a continual development of such orientations toward play from Grades 3 to 12 in the school system and that such values were also regarded as significant within the university community. The Mantel and VanderVelden study, as well as that of Maloney and Petrie, indicated that there was an association between participation in organized sport and the development of a professionalization of attitude which was greater than that found within the normal population.

Recent papers presented by Rehberg and Cohen (1971), Schafer (1971), Spady (1971), Parker (1971), Lenk (1971), Petrie (1971c and 1972) and Puretz (1969) all provide the reasoning behind, and the empirical substantiation for the acceptance of the validity of the third proposition. In each case, the author, whether through conjectural analysis, or through research into specific athletic groups, concluded that athletes were more conservative in their political ideologies than nonathletes.

Of particular interest were the papers of Schafer, and Rehberg and Cohen. Schafer contrasted the prevailing socialization themes expressed by the youth counterculture with those of the athletic subculture while Rehberg and Cohen discussed their research on the dimensions of political attitudes associated with the acceptance of authority, the view of American society, the individual position with respect to the draft, and the role of the individual in bringing about change. The athletes were found to be more conservative than nonathletes on the first three dimensions, but the relationship was found to be conditional upon the level of measured intelligence.

The final proposition, and the one which was the major concern of this study, was contingent upon the acceptance of the assumption that there would be differences in the effectiveness of athletic socialization between the team athletes and those competing in individual sports. Given the greater significance of the development of a "team spirit" among the

former, as well as the greater perceived significance of such sports in the eyes of the supporting public, it would appear to be reasonable to believe that team athletes would emphasize those component values which appear to be associated with conservative political ideologies. Additionally, the power of the coach, whose basically conservative viewpoints have been amply recorded, would appear to an additional feature leading to such an effect.

Individual sport athletes, who appear to have been at the forefront of the "athletic revolution" discussed by Scott (1969, 1971) and more concerned with the development of "individuation through sport" (Petrie 1972) might be reasonably expected to provide less support for conservative political ideologies, especially with regard to the diminution of social change and respect for traditional values.

RESEARCH PROCEDURE

In order to operationalize the concepts contained within the research propositions and hypotheses, it was decided to incorporate several measures of political ideology. In the first place, it was believed that most studies concerning athletes and political attitudes were using a rather broad conception of political ideology. This broad conception is termed "global ideology" in this study, with the basic positions regarded as "global conservatism" or "global liberalism" (of course, such examples are not intended as extreme positions on a continuum). Accordingly a measure of "global conservatism", the McClosky Political Conservatism Scale (1958), was incorporated as a component part of the study. A further measure of "global ideology", a self report scale, was also included.

Political ideologies appear, however, to fluctuate in significance as determinants of action in relation to given issues. As a result, it was decided to develop a number of attitudinal questions which would allow for close examination of "issue oriented conservatism-liberalism" within the study. Specific dimensions were incorporated as possible scales of "issue oriented conservatism-liberalism" and these included;

(a) Acceptance or rejection of violence and property damage in support of a cause.

(b) Acceptance or rejection of economic values associated with political ideologies.

(c) Attitudes toward liberalization of drug laws.

(d) Attitudes toward the performance of the political-legal institution, especially with reference to recent issues.

(e) Attitudes to issues associated with abortion, homosexuality, women's rights, and the future of the institution of marriage, all of which have become the focus of support or rejection by conservative groups.

(f) Attitudes toward general liberal viewpoints associated with university life.

In addition, the component of the Rehberg scale (1971) dealing with the acceptance or rejection of action in association with a cause was incorporated in the survey package.

The Survey Instrument

The questionnaire development passed through several stages in order to refine content and maximize validity. Several judgemental groups were employed, comprising members of the academic community, with representation from the faculties of the Departments of Political Science, Sociology and Psychology, and individuals with extreme right or left wing political beliefs.

Pre-testing led to further refinement while the choice of the Likert response format allowed for determination of Internal Consistency from the answers of the respondents to the attitudinal questions.

The questionnaire in its final form was an amalgam of the following units;

(a) The McClosky Political Conservatism Scale.

(b) A measure of Self Reported Political Ideology.

(c) Attitudinal statements reflecting extreme viewpoints on specific political issues. These statements provided an opportunity to evaluate issue-oriented conservatism or liberalism. A total of thirty-eight statements were used.

(d) The Rehberg Political Action Scale.

(e) Background questions.

Sampling Procedure

Lists were available of the members of the Intercollegiate team and individual sport athletes registered at the University of Western Ontario for the Academic Year 1971-72. Systematic random sampling was employed, with a 1:2 sampling rate being used for the Intercollegiate athletic group. This technique led to the selection of 230 athletes* as members of the sample.

The questionnaire was mailed to each member of the sample and, as each survey instrument was numbered, it was possible to send follow-up letters to those who had not responded by the end of the first and second weeks following initial distribution.

The ultimate return rate was 66.96 per cent, with 150 of the 224 questionnaires being returned.

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*6 members of the sample of athletes were eliminated for various reasons; Three were managers of teams and three represented in more than one team and were sampled twice.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

McClosky Scale of Political Conservatism.

The initial analysis consisted of determining the internal consistency of the items comprising the scale. Using the Spearman rank correlation coefficient between rankings on the Likert continuum for each item, and the overall scale score (determined by both summation of the scores and summation of the number of responses pre-determined to be conservative) it was found that the seventh and ninth items were marginally acceptable while all others met the criteria for acceptability.

Analysis of the differences between team athletes and individual sport athletes indicated that on all of the items with the exception of that related to the source of political authority, the athletes consistently endorsed liberal response categories. No significant differences were evident on any of the items, with the exception of that concerned with the desirability of retaining existing modes of performance (Table 1).

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Clearly, the hypothesized relationship between the form of athletic participation and development of "global conservatism" was not supported in this analysis. Team and individual

sport athletes, regardless of sex, provided relatively consistent endorsement of "global liberalism" as their preferred political ideology.

Self Reported Political Ideology.

In order to provide for a simple check of "global political ideology", a fixed-choice self report scale providing choices within the two extremes of Revolutionary and Extreme Conservative was employed within the survey.

Upon analysis of the data, it was found that the expected cell frequencies in the extreme categories did not fulfill the assumptions of the Chi Square test. Collapsing the cells about three ideological positions appeared to be the only acceptable course of action even though this entailed a loss of richness in the data.

The results indicated that there were no significant differences between the team and individual sport athletes on self reported political ideology, with the liberal category being supported by the majority (Table 2).

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

Again, the hypothesized relationship between the form of athletic participation, and adherence to "global conservatism" was not supported by the data.

Issue-Oriented Political Ideology.

After a prior analysis to determine the level of internal

consistency of the items making up each of the proposed scales, 18 of the 38 items were found to be acceptable within the rather severe standards set (the correlation was to be statistically significant at the p.05 level, and, additionally, had to exceed $r_s = +0.50$). While it is admitted that such criteria might ignore some potentially useful items, the main interest here was to maximize validity so that group differences on ideology could be clarified.

Of the items selected, four dealt with the use of violence and property damage for political ends, five were associated with questions on the performance of the political-legal institution, three concerned drug laws, two concerned abortion, and four dealt with university-oriented problems.

Analysis of the data revealed that the athletes, regardless of form of participation, provided relatively similar responses to the various items. There was, however, a degree of inconsistency in ideological orientation with respect to the issues.

The athletes were predominantly liberal on issues related to drugs, abortion, and university problems, were conservative with respect to the use of violence and property damage to attain political ends, and provided variable responses to the political-legal issues (Table 3).

INSERT TABLE 3 HERE

The variable responses on the political-legal dimensions

indicated that the athletes as a group had faith in the Canadian system of government and apparently saw little need for change. They rejected the idea that only the economically powerful were protected by the legal system and indicated that they believed that a fair trial was possible for all, regardless of social position. The athletes gave majority support for the liberal orientation concerning the unjust distribution of wealth in Canada and rejected the conservative belief that the welfare rolls contained many people who were capable of work and should be subject to a withdrawal of support.

Despite the fact that there were no statistically significant differences between the groups on any of the selected items, the relative frequency with which the members of the women's individual sports showed a higher proportional support for conservative response patterns was of interest, and may justifiably become the focus of additional studies in the area.

Rehberg Political Action Scale.

The Rehberg Scale utilized a simple agree-disagree format to determine the strength of support for activism in relation to a cause, as well as the degree of acceptance of present laws related to social issues.

In each case, the athletes as a group indicated support for becoming involved in a variety of ways to support a cause. They supported the idea of participation in a march, organizing

meetings, taking part in strikes, sit-ins, and legitimate political campaigns. They specifically rejected the question concerning alienation from the political process.

The results were not as clear cut when the degree of support for laws relating to social issues was analysed. The response patterns were variable between groups, but, except for the question regarding support for the power of the university establishment, no significant differences were found to be present (Table 4).

All groups, with the exception of members of women's teams, provided support for positions at variance to the existing marijuana laws, but there was considerable support among the athletes for the existing laws related to heroin usage. The existing powers of the police were endorsed as acceptable by each of the athletic groups, but there was a significant difference between the groups on acceptance of the powers of the university establishment. Analysis of the group response patterns for this final question showed that the women's team athletes were strongly negative to this question while all other groups gave predominantly affirmative responses.

INSERT TABLE 4 HERE

Comparison with the data presented by Rehberg (1971) indicated that the Canadian university athletes were more inclined toward activism than the Athletics-Only sub-group

of the American high school sample. The Canadian athletes were more inclined to endorse participation in political campaigns, marches, sit-ins, and strikes, and to organize meetings in support of a cause. They were less inclined to accept laws related to marijuana and heroin, but gave stronger support for acceptance of the powers of the police and of the university establishment than students in the Rehberg sample.

Discussion.

Analysis of the results taken as a whole lead only to the conclusion that empirical support for the theoretical proposition upon which this study was based was minimal. There was little justification to believe that team athletes were more likely to endorse "global conservatism" or "issue-oriented conservatism" than the individual sport athletes. Indeed, the data suggest that the predominant political orientation among the athletes was liberalism, regardless of category.

Of even greater significance was the fact that the direction of the results virtually invalidated the entire theoretical structure. Several reasons may be advanced to account for the directions indicated in the study, and these should be presented here in order that continued research into this highly interesting area should not be discouraged.

The basic orientations and conceptual linkages which were integrated into the axioms and propositions guiding this

study were predominantly derived from sources in the United States. A major assumption implicit to the study was the belief that the associations found to exist between athletic participation and conservatism in the United States would also be in operation in the Canadian social system. Clearly, this assumption must now be rejected.

No athletic scholarships of the type awarded in the United States are provided for Canadian university athletes and it is possible that the resultant low level of institutional control over the athlete in the Canadian setting might account for the more liberal ideological structures found to be prevalent in this study.

An interesting feature with regard to the direction of ideological preference is the fact that the area of Southwestern Ontario from which the university draws most of its students generally supports Conservative candidates in the Provincial and Federal elections. This feature might lead one to believe that a social desirability effect was in operation among the respondents. There appears to be a general association of liberalism with university students and educated youth, and it was believed possible that the responses were adjusted to conform to this belief. In this respect, then, the choice of the Likert format, with extreme positions represented in the item stimuli may have made it easier for the respondents to readily perceive the socially desirable extremity of each continuum. A recommendation that might assist in future research is the use of item

stimuli on a higher level of abstraction.

It was also believed possible that the results reflected conditions at the University of Western Ontario where the interaction styles employed by many of the coaches derive from humanistic rather than authoritarian orientations.

For these reasons, it would be appropriate for others interested in political socialization through athletics to consider the possibility of replication in both Canada and United States before concluding that substantial differences exist between Intercollegiate athletes in both countries.

The results of the present study, however, clearly and consistently indicated that the Canadian athletes sampled were predominantly liberal in their political orientations. This feature should motivate additional study to determine the features in the socialization experience of relevance to the development of political ideological structures in the Canadian athlete.

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Table 1. Summary table of team and individual sport participation and scores on McClosky Political Conservatism Scale.

Item	Higher Conservative rankings[1]	Category of major response	df	Chi square	Prob.
1. Prefer practical man ... (N=142)	W. Team W. Indiv.	Liberal	6	6.375	NS[2]
2. Change makes things worse ... (N=143)	M. Team W. Team	Liberal	6	7.049	NS
3. Old modes have wisdom ... (N=143)	M. Indiv. M. Team	Liberal	6	3.240	NS
4. Better to keep what you have ... (N=144)	M. Team	Liberal	6	12.872	<.05
5. Respect work of forefathers ... (N=141)	W. Team M. Team	Liberal	6	3.368	NS
6. Wisdom comes with age ... (N=143)	W. Indiv. M. Indiv.	Liberal	6	6.480	NS
7. Political authority from higher power ... (N=142)	M. Team W. Team	Conserv.	6	5.458	NS
8. See if a new mode works first ... (N=144)	M. Indiv. M. Team	Liberal	6	7.836	NS
9. Harmony possible without change ... (N=145)	M. Indiv. W. Team	Liberal	6	3.377	NS

[1]The two groups providing the highest proportion of conservative response to each item are indicated except where a significant difference has been determined. In this case the group or groups most differentiated from the others are identified.

[2]NS = Not statistically significant at p .05.

Table 2. Team and individual sport participation and self-reported political ideology (N=121)[1]

Sport category	Liberal, radical or Revolutionary	Middle of the Road	Conservative, or Extreme Conservative	TOTAL
Male Team Athletes (N=44)	47.7	38.6	13.6	100
Male Individual Athletes (N=33)	54.5	36.4	9.1	100
Female Team Athletes (N=15)	40.0	33.3	26.7	100
Female Individual Athletes (N=29)	51.7	31.0	17.2	100

X^2 = 3.109, not significant at p.05.

[1]A total of 15 athletes endorsed "Nothing", and 4 indicated that they "Did not wish to answer". Both groups were deleted from the analysis.

Table 3. Team and individual sport participation and issue-oriented political ideology.

Issue	Higher conservative rankings[1]	Category of Major Response	df	Chi square	Prob.
1. Shoplifting a legitimate political act ... (N=144)	W. Indiv. M. Indiv.	Conserv.	6	8.460	NS[2]
2. Trashing as politically justifiable ... (N=143)	W. Indiv. M. Team	Conserv.	6	4.176	NS
3. Violence in defense of a cause justifiable ... (N=144)	W. Indiv. W. Team	Conserv.	6	10.135	NS
4. Demonstrations must be non-violent ...(N=144)	W. Indiv. W. Team	Conserv.	6	4.873	NS
5. Legalize soft drugs ... (N=144)	W. Indiv. M. Team	Liberal	6	3.787	NS
6. Hard drugs available on prescription ... (N=144)	W. Team W. Indiv.	Conserv.	6	11.383	NS
7. Turn-in-a-Pusher Program worthwhile ... (N=144)	M. Indiv. M. Team	Liberal	6	5.265	NS
8. Cut welfare rolls ... (N=145)	M. Indiv. M. Team	Liberal	6	7.580	NS
9. Legal system protects powerful ... (N=145)	W. Indiv. M. Indiv.	Conserv.	6	3.532	NS
10. Political system protects weak and strong ... (N=145)	W. Indiv. M. Team	Conserv.	6	4.277	NS
11. Wealth is unjustly distributed ... (N=145)	W. Indiv. M. Team	Liberal	6	4.396	NS
12. Poor cannot get fair trial ... (N=145)	M. Indiv. M. Team	Conserv.	6	4.510	NS
13. Abortion is murder ... (N=145)	W. Team M. Indiv.	Liberal	6	7.905	NS
14. Abortion as nobody's business but the woman's (N=145)	W. Team M. Indiv.	Liberal	6	3.305	NS
15. Grades as sole Uni. entrance criteria ... (N=145)	W. Team W. Indiv.	Mixed	6	3.043	NS
16. Hippies are degenerates ... (N=143)	M. Team M. Indiv.	Liberal	6	6.950	NS
17. Attack radical demonstrators ... (N=143)		Liberal	6	3.450	NS
18. Kick radicals, etc. off campus ... (N=143)	M. Indiv. W. Indiv.	Liberal	6	4.497	NS

1. Shoplifting a legitimate political act ... (N=144)	W. Indiv. M. Indiv.	Conserv.	6	8.460	NS[2]
2. Trashing as politically justifiable ... (N=143)	W. Indiv. M. Team	Conserv.	6	4.176	NS
3. Violence in defense of a cause justifiable ... (N=144)	W. Indiv. W. Team	Conserv.	6	10.135	NS
4. Demonstrations must be non-violent ...(N=144)	W. Indiv. W. Team	Conserv.	6	4.873	NS
5. Legalize soft drugs ... (N=144)	W. Indiv. M. Team	Liberal	6	3.787	NS
6. Hard drugs available on prescription ... (N=144)	W. Team W. Indiv.	Conserv.	6	11.383	NS
7. Turn-in-a-Pusher Program worthwhile ... (N=144)	M. Indiv. M. Team	Liberal	6	5.265	NS
8. Cut welfare rolls ... (N=145)	M. Indiv. M. Team	Liberal	6	7.580	NS
9. Legal system protects powerful ... (N=145)	W. Indiv. M. Indiv.	Conserv.	6	3.532	NS
10. Political system protects weak and strong ... (N=145)	W. Indiv. M. Team	Conserv.	6	4.277	NS
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16. Hippies are degenerates ... (N=143)	M. Team M. Indiv.	Liberal	6	6.950	NS
17. Attack radical demonstrators ... (N=143)		Liberal	6	3.450	NS
18. Kick radicals, etc. off campus ... (N=143)	M. Indiv. W. Indiv.	Liberal	6	4.497	NS

[1]The two groups providing the highest proportion of conservative response to each item are indicated. Where proportion below 5 per cent, no group is shown.

[2] S = not significant at p < .05.

Table 4. Summary table of team and individual sport participation and responses to the Rehberg Political Activitism Scale.

Item	Proportion of agreement	High agreement groups	df	Chi square	Prob.
1. I would march to support cause (N=142)	76.8[a]	M. Indiv. W. Team	3	3.718	NS
2. I would organize meetings for cause (N=139)	70.5[a]	M. Indiv. W. Team W. Indiv.	3	2.332	NS
3. I would strike to support cause (N=142)	71.8[a]	W. Team M. Indiv.	3	2.608	NS
4. I would sit-in to support cause (N=141)	66.7[a]	W. Team M. Indiv.	3	0.184	NS
5. I would take part in political campaigns (N=144)	74.3[a]	W. Indiv. M. Indiv.	3	2.200	NS
6. I couldn't care less about political involvement (N=140)	18.6	W. Team M. Team	3	4.563	NS
7. I readily accept marijuana laws (N=142)	40.8	W. Team	3	5.093	NS
8. I readily accept heroin laws (N=142)	84.5	W. Team M. Indiv.	3	0.427	NS
9. I readily accept powers of police (N=143)	74.8	W. Indiv. M. Team	3	2.171	NS
10. I readily accept powers of univ. establishment (N=142)	56.3	W. Indiv. M. Team M. Indiv.	3	10.250	<.02

a = agreement to this item is regarded as an activist response.